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SUCCESS IN COPENHAGEN?

Reports and analysis
Police repression

GRIFFIN ON QUESTION TIME

THE LIMITS OF COOPERATIVES

Iain McKay
on mutualism

Theory into practice?

January '10 - May '10

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editorial

In some ways, Copenhagen was post-politics in action. Thousands of politicians, business leaders and civil society actors came together in the Danish capital with no lesser aim than to 'save the world'. Not just to prevent further wars, to eradicate poverty or to save humanity – no, the whole planet was at stake. And this was to be our last chance! The ambitions of the leaders translated into hope and expectations from their followers. Ed Miliband and Gordon Brown were sent on their way to Copenhagen with a blue Wave of support and encouragement by Oxfam, Friends of the Earth and the Co-operative Group. Anyone with a dissenting voice was easily labelled an extremist trouble-maker who selfishly puts ideology before the survival of the Earth.

The failure to come up with a legally-binding international treaty to reduce carbon emissions has, however, re-introduced some politics into the climate craze. Hope-nhagen has become Cop-enhagen, and the fairly indiscriminate preventative approach by the Danish police has sparked a new appreciation of the repression and control that could come with a state and business brokered climate deal. Yet, there is little sense of despair or resignation: "we are all eco-warriors now", we could read in the Guardian on the eve of the COP-15 conference.

There is a danger of course that this will just mean more austerity and lifestyle politics (changing yet more lightbulbs), without the political vision that could shape an antagonistic movement. Already in the streets of Copenhagen, many felt that rejection of the summit and everything it did, and might, stand for was largely missing. Those who predicted this to be 'the big one' – the movement's 'coming of age', 10 years after Seattle – were not hoping for a riot or a mass blockade of the meetings. Supposedly, what was really going to set the protests apart from previous ones were the alternatives on offer.

Naomi Klein, for example, praised the practices of the global climate movement: "Unlike at previous summits, where alternatives seemed like an afterthought, in Copenhagen the alternatives will take centre stage." Many grassroots activists in the UK are also motivated by the array of practical possibilities that are at hand to get us out of the climate crisis. And we can definitely relate to the appreciation of self-organisation, when this comes as a political principle and not just a lifestyle action. But for those who never thought of a Copenhagen deal as success, the focus on practical alternatives won't get us out of the 'post-political' scenario that dominates the response to climate change. Differentiating ourselves from the political elite merely through our DIY approach is not enough when we are faced with the overwhelming political consensus on climate change and the 'anything goes' attitude that slips through the back door due to lack of political debate. This post-political system can only be broken through direct antagonism and outright rejection.

Through our enthusiastic attempts to show people that we do have alternatives to the status quo and are not just a bunch of idealists it sometimes feels like we lose the critical element that might facilitate a break from the system. At last years' Climate Camp on Blackheath there were some really great discussions on economic hegemony and alternatives designed to break away from the current system. In panel discussions with large audiences, speakers ranging from Green Party representatives to climate campers discussed the exciting world of alternative economics, and housing and workers' co-operatives. However, as uplifting as it is to think that we can break away from capitalism through our housing and career decisions it would be naïve to think that these 'alternatives' escape from the same structures that they aim to challenge. In order to make discussions of these alternatives fulfil their potential there must also be an antagonistic element to our political action.

"Wrong life cannot be lived rightly". One of our contributors quotes Adorno as a cynic whose philosophy has immobilised some parts of the radical left. However, when we consider the complete domination of the current political and economic system, manifest in the hugely consensual yet hopeless response to climate change at the recent COP summit, it often appears that this philosophical principle is not cynical, but rather an empowering form of rejection and antagonism against the entirety of the system that dominates every aspect of our lives. Maybe this is the only way to achieve political action that cannot be recuperated, taken from us, watered down and written into a Labour/Tory/Green Party policy paper or a Guardian 'How to be green' pull out.

L.W. & R.S.

Bertie Russell

the political success of the copl5 mobilizations is still to come...

A feeling of failure will undoubtedly be one of the most common emotions for those who spent a cold week or more in Copenhagen. I felt defeated after participating in an ineffectual affinity group, staring at a screen in the Støberiet convergence centre watching reruns of my friends being beaten, arrested and pepper sprayed. It is hard to associate any emotions with the 'Reclaim Power' action on the 16th other than regret, sorrow, and failure. In terms of affirming personal commitment to social change, the Reclaim Power action will not be remembered fondly. However, I believe to read the events of Copenhagen in this way is quite limited, putting the emphasis on personal emotions and experience rather than a broader political reading of the outcome of the mobilization. Contra to what my heart tells me, the mobilizations of Copenhagen were a success.

The mobilization around the UNFCCC's fifteenth summit in Copenhagen was a politically messy process. As illustrated by the tiresome 'shut them in or shut them down' debates that dragged on for months like a bad summit hopping hangover, there was no easy 'inside/outside' relationship that provided simple alliances between those 'against' climate change opposed to those 'for' it. Rather we faced a complex institutional process that pulled together NGOs and governments around the desperate myth that they were there to 'solve climate change'. The reality is that the COP15, despite the intentions of many of the participants, served as an attempt to inaugurate a new round of 'green' capitalist accumulation and to establish new regimes of political legitimacy. In the most literal of terms, these high level political processes are designed to capitalize on the environmental crisis.

The demographic of a movement

Contra to major NGOs such as WWF that actively support the extension of capitalist markets and stronger state control as 'solutions' to the climate crisis, networks such as Climate Justice Now! (CJN!) and Climate Justice Action (CJA) understand that it is only through forcing profound systemic change that we are going to prevent the worst effects of global warming becoming reality. Influenced by the Durban Declaration of 2004, CJN! emerged at the Bali COP as a network of organisations with strong representation from the global south unified by their opposition to carbon markets and the burning of fossil fuels, and their shared commitment to building a global grassroots movement for climate justice. Over the past five years many of the member organisations have continued to be active within the COP process, actively resisting attempts to establish carbon markets and false solutions that serve only to further capitalist accumulation and state legitimacy. CJN! was responsible for initiating the 'System Change not Climate Change!' block on the 12th, of which CJA later became a co-organiser.

The goals of CJN! are broadly shared by Climate Justice Action (CJA), a predominantly European network of individuals and organisations that formed around a call to action in September 2008. A series of working principles and network goals provides CJA's cohesion, echoing CJN!s desire to challenge false and market-based solutions and to build a global movement for climate justice. Whilst the heterogeneity of participants is reflected in the somewhat cautious wording, one particular goal – 'To both sharpen our understanding of, and to address, the root social, ecological, political and economic causes of the climate crisis towards a total systemic trans-

formation of our society' – reveals the radical pretension of a network whose concerns go far beyond 'climate change' as an isolated and apolitical condition. CJA was responsible for initiating the 'Reclaim Power: Pushing for Climate Justice' action on the 16th. The decision taken by CJN! at the September meeting in Bangkok to play a role in co-organising both events transformed the political potential of the Reclaim Power action, the possibility of internal disruption of the COP and increased participation in the mass walkout overcoming any sterile inside/outside binary that it could so easily have fallen into.

Seen by some as the more 'radical' element of the mobilizations, Never Trust A Cop (NTAC) emerged out of the March CJA meeting in response to the perceived need for a more explicitly anticapitalist platform in the mobilizations. The March meeting was consumed by negotiations over the goals of CJA and the mass action concept, and the formation of NTAC was arguably grounded in concerns that NGO elements within CJA were compromising the politics of the network to the point that it was impossible to maintain an explicitly anticapitalist and antagonistic position. Indeed, NTAC's original call out stated – "we will refuse to side with sell-out NGOs and all the would-be managers of protest". Notwithstanding these concerns, NTAC's 'Hit the Production' action was formally supported by CJA at the October gathering, whilst many individuals were active in both networks, suggesting there was little in the way of political division between the two. What NTAC offered to the mobilizations was ultimately a confrontational aesthetic utilised to mobilize a 'European' crowd with significantly different political histories to those in the UK. Despite the fact that it was less problematic for NTAC to articulate a critique of capitalism and the dangerous tendencies of environmental movements towards ecofascism, those claims that NTAC was 'more' radical/anticapitalist are mostly superficial, and are likely to be based on aesthetic judgement rather than political analysis.

Finally, CJN!, CJA and NTAC must be clearly distinguished from the Climate Action Network (CAN). CAN is the hegemonic NGO block within the COP process which tends towards apolitical contributions based on urging governments to 'take action'. Campaign networks such as TckTckTck and Stop Climate Chaos act as the 'public face' of CAN and serve to demonstrate 'popular public support' for the bargaining positions of reformist positions within the negotiations.

A genealogy of a movement

In the weeks before Copenhagen I asked myself what it would mean to succeed. First and foremost, we needed to see the seeds of a global movement planted, we needed a new 'Seattle', we needed to create a refrain that allowed us to struggle

shoulder to shoulder regardless of our geographies. Second, we needed to delegitimize the entire COP process, revealing it as an attempt to restart capitalist accumulation as 'Green Capitalism' and to reassert a political legitimacy grounded in a 'Green authoritarianism'. Third, we needed a future. Quite simply, we needed to leave Copenhagen seeing new political possibilities that were not there before.

The events of the fortnight, not limiting it to the activist ghetto, lead me to answer positively to all three of my standard bearers of success. There were a number of catalysts, some in our hands and some not, that have led to the very real possibility of a global movement surfacing over the coming year. Dealing with these catalysts chronologically, the 'Danish text' leaked in the first week enraged those organizations that, despite their critiques of the COP, were still engaged in the COP process. These were largely NGOs such as the Indigenous Environmental Network, who despite critiques of not only the COP process but often capitalism and the state, engaged in the formal talks in the hope it offered the 'pragmatic' option in preventing the imminent destruction of their communities and livelihoods. The Danish text played a crucial role in confirming that the COP was not only flawed in principle, but also failed to fulfil any claim as the pragmatic option.

Secondly, the experience of the 'System Change not Climate Change' block on the 12th revealed the increasing divide between reformist NGOs and CJA/N!. Despite the scandal of the Danish text and an increasing clarity that the COP was destined to fail, the organizers continued with a rhetoric of calling on 'world leaders [to] take urgent and resolute action'. This position clearly contrasted with the systemic critique articulated at the joint CJA/N! press conference, which was held inside the Bella centre itself the day before the Reclaim Power! action on the 16th. Participants from both climate justice networks denounced the possibility that solutions to the climate crisis were compatible with the extension of the capitalist system through mechanisms such as carbon trading and REDD. The press conference was immediately followed by the arrest of CJA spokesperson Tadzio Mueller, illuminating that the repression was occurring not simply against those 'outside' the Bella centre, but rather against dissenting voices per se regardless of their position inside or outside of the formal COP process. Any reading of Copenhagen that draws simplistic lines between those 'inside' and those 'outside' will fall far short of developing an understanding of where our affinities lie.

«This shared desire moves us beyond the post-political space of carbon towards a shared antagonism against capitalism as the root cause of the climate crisis»

Thirdly, the action on the 16th pulled together these various threads to form a new political subjectivity - if only we are capable of realizing it. The explicit aims of the action were to delegitimize the COP itself, and to work upon building a social movement capable of building another world to that pursued by established institutions. When we decry our inability to breach the fence of the UN area as a sign of failure, we should recall what one member of the Italian social centre network articulated at the October CJA gathering – 'We should not think that the measure of our political success will be found in the lines drawn in the sand. Rather, our success will be based on our ability to reveal and breach immaterial lines, political lines drawn in the air'. Unlike Seattle, where the political lines correlated closely with physical fences or police lines, the political lines of Copenhagen were between those who wanted to further expand capitalist accumulation and state control and those fighting for a more egalitarian world based on respect and a shared life with each other and the planet we live on. What was unique about the 16th, and what allowed these political lines to be revealed, was the homogenous police response to both those confronting and those undergoing exodus from the Bella centre. It mattered not where the dissenting voices came from, the physical fence between us was far less important that the emerging unification of dissent that was suppressed in every instance.

To be clear, the action of the 16th had enormous potential that was not fulfilled. If the fence truly had been breached, if there had been broader political and numerical participation, and we had something that really could be called a peoples assembly inside the UN area, the political affects may have been immeasurable. We can only dream of what could have been. Yet as it stands the COP was publicly revealed as a process that suffocates all dissenting voices by default, that excludes those that believe in a world based on anything but accumulation and control. This exclusion and suffocation revealed a shared political subjectivity that has the strength to become the basis of a global movement - all those who reject a world of accumulation, control and environmental degradation in favour of a world of egality, openness and creative potential. In short, all those who not only demand but will create 'system change not climate change'.

The realisation of a movement

The CJN! debrief and 'where next?' meeting held on the 19th in Øsknehallen brought together participants in the CJN! and CJA network, ranging from members of Via Campesina and ATTAC to Filipino fishing communities and UK Climate Campers. This diverse group of people announced together that what binds us is our desire for system change not climate change, that we have a basis of resistance and a dream of other worlds that can be realized together. This shared desire moves us beyond the post-political space of carbon towards a shared antagonism against capitalism as the root cause of the climate crisis we face. Undoubtedly what is meant

by 'system change' is up for debate – we almost certainly do not agree upon what we mean by either 'system' or 'change' – yet the reinvigoration of this discussion necessitates a fundamental shift in terms of what it means to struggle 'against' climate change.

We live in exciting times where we face the very real possibility of building a global movement capable of engaging with climate change on a different terrain, yet if we are to realise this movement we must recognize the antagonistic subjectivity that affiliates us. The time for 'carbon post-politics' is over - we will not find affinities in the abstractions of carbon, it is not a language conducive to political movement. Instead we must realise a subjectivity based on an antagonism towards capitalism and control, a subjectivity that is not exclusive but capable of iteration across social, geographical and topical boundaries. We must develop a shared critical understanding of climate change as a power struggle rather than a neutral field where 'we are all in this together' – the peasant farmer in Brazil does not stand shoulder to shoulder with Wall Street and the White House.

A number of 'recommendations' towards this realisation emerged out of the meeting on the 19th - calls for a global day of action for 'system change not climate change' in the autumn are real and supported by a diverse network of people that share a fundamental desire for another world. The possibility of global-regional 'Peoples Assemblies for Climate Justice' to be held concurrently has had support from participants on every continent. Yet none of these things will happen unless we make them happen. It is up to us to make this movement move, to resist co-optation and capture by corporate solutions, political parties or reformist unions in favour of strategies that free us from the expanding cycle of capital that is responsible for climate change.

Bertie Russell is involved in CJA and the Camp for Climate Action. The author would like to thank Sanne Braudel for her insightful reflections and commitment in correcting his inaccuracies.

Ben Lear

cop15 diary

The build up to this years UN conference on climate change, the COP-15 in Copenhagen, was huge. Both mainstream and alternative media were abuzz with predictions and discussions on the conference and the, almost obligatory, counter-mobilisation. From the Climate Camp at Blackheath to the pages of the Guardian and the Financial Times Copenhagen was billed as the spectacle to end all spectacles. Where a truly global climate justice movement would emerge or where the deal that would save the planet would be signed. Much was made of the fact that this counter-mobilisation would fall a decade after the Seattle protests. Would this be, as Naomi Klein suggested, the coming of age party of the alter-globalisation movement?

Journey

We hopped on a (full) bus put on by Climate Camp in Leeds and settled in for our day long coach journey. Everyone was excited if not a little apprehensive. Would we even make it over the border, let alone in time for the demonstration the next day? Despite being nervous about being stopped and searched we had no problems, being let through by German police without even being searched and rolling into Copenhagen with six hours to spare before the big Friends of the Earth demonstration in the centre of town.

Saturday 12th

After the standard organisational mayhem surrounding sorting out sleeping space for 250 people we made our way to the large "Flood for Climate Justice" demonstration, organised by Friends of the Earth. Attendance has been estimated at somewhere around 100,000, which is a far cry from the 300,000 in Genoa or the million in London on the eve of the Iraq war. If this was the most important event in the history of climate change politics, large amounts of people must have been very conscious of their carbon footprints. However, those in attendance spanned the entire environmental spectrum.

Sound trucks, samba bands and facepaint made for a bewildering spectacle as we tried to find the anti-authoritarian bloc. The bloc disappointingly lacked banners of any sort (with the exception of a large orange banner quoting an anarchist federation article printed in the last edition of Shift "We don't want a bigger slice of the cake, we want the whole fucking bakery") and was smaller than we had expected.

Once the demo had started we got our first taste of the difficulties involved with transnational organising. We encountered a group of British people dressed in suits, holding banners supporting carbon trading and chanting pro-capitalist slogans through megaphones. Some of the more eager members of the bloc went over and passionately, some even physically, confronted these people, not realising that they were acting out roles. It took the physical intervention of a few bystanders and other member of the bloc to make it clear that the suited strangers were allies and not enemies. Cultural and linguistic differences would have to be bridged over this week if we wanted to be successful.

The bloc continued, eventually being caught up with by a larger more organised bloc. It seems that in the confusion of the assembly point, two blocs had formed. Ours had left with the demonstration whilst the other, larger, bloc had only left at the insistence of the police, who argued that to remain would be to leave the legal demonstration. Later we would find out that members of this bloc had fired fireworks at the Danish foreign ministry, thrown stones and smashed several windows of a Danish bank.

The potential for this to spread and become more generalised was curtailed by a stunningly executed, if indiscriminate kettle deployed by the Danish police. Within a minute half the bloc, as well as other demonstrators and bystanders were stuck in a kettle leading to the mass arrest of over nine hundred people. Luckily for myself and my friends we managed to dive into the apartment block we were kettled against and find refuge in an apartment with an 80 year old lady. Eight of us spent the next six hours drinking tea and watching the arrests from the balcony of her apartment feeling strangely guilty. One person we were with watched his entire affinity group being restrained, placed in rows with everyone else on the dark, icy streets of Copenhagen and made to wait four hours for mass transit to the specially installed prison north of the city, modelled on the German G8 detention facilities. The preventive laws which were used to make this mass arrest had been specially instated for the Copenhagen summit and would become a recurring theme, and ever present threat, for the rest of the mobilisation.

Later that evening we made our way through streets littered with scarves and snapped placards feeling thoroughly deflated. Indeed the only victory of the day had been the personal one of escaping arrest. Whilst the majority of the radical bloc had been preventively detained, thousands had marched to encourage "our leaders" to do the right thing here in Copenhagen. It seemed evident that evening that there were differing opinions on what climate justice should look like and how we might

get there.

Sunday 13th

In theaftermath of yesterday's protest, with many still in jail, the 'Hit Production' demo, promising autonomous actions against the docks, promised to be the most interesting action of the day. We followed the helicopters to the meet up site only to witness the demo already being chased by a large amount of police. We tracked the demo through side streets until the already familiar sight of mass detention coaches suggested a bad result. We would later find out the demo had been kettled, with tear gas and pepper spray being used fairly indiscriminately. The organised autonomous groups that the action had relied on were noticeable by their absence and this would be true over the whole week. The preventative laws, coupled with an aggressive police force unafraid to employ mass arrest was causing problems for our demonstrations even remaining on the streets, yet alone being effective. It certainly felt that the police had the upper hand.

In the evening we attended the first of the Climate Justice Action (CJA) 'Reclaim Power' meetings in preparation for Wednesday's attempt to gain entrance to the Bella Centre to hold a people's conference. The meeting was well organised and positive, if not a little dominated by members of the UK climate camp. The militant, autonomous left were conspicuous by their absence. Many were still in prison from the day before whilst, we were told, many had left after Saturday's demonstration. This was quite a worrying development - just who would be going to the rest of the weeks demonstrations?

Monday 14th

The main event of this day was the No Border demonstration that would head through town towards the Danish Ministry of Defence. There was an interesting mix of people at the demonstration, as well as those masked up and clad in black there were also many from more environment focused groups. The demonstration had the last remaining sound truck, (the others having already been confiscated) and the music, although interspersed with increasingly manic commentary from the truck, made a nice change from the already annoying and ever present samba band. In response to the police tactics so far a greater effort was made to maintain the sides of the demonstrations by linking arms as we moved. Whether this deterred the police or not (they were already being criticised in the media), it certainly bound everyone together (almost literally!) and helped to create a more confrontational attitude. Although it was great to see such a diverse attendance at the demo, some interpretations of No Border politics were slightly worrying. From one of the sound trucks the people with the microphones were almost screaming "No Borders, First Nations" at one point, to the prominent presence of the Robin Wood banner declaring "Transportation Kills" it was clear we didn't all hold the same positions.

«it is clear that there are big differences between the political traditions involved in the climate justice movement»

After we arrived at the Danish ministry of defence, and the organised autonomous groups that were encouraged to storm the building once again failed to emerge, the sound truck parked in the square opposite and people began to dance. A nearby giant inflatable orange ball visually demonstrating a tonne of co2 was un-tethered by a large crowd and rolled away down the road with scores of police in pursuit. The ball, now punctured in several places, was eventually recovered by the police and several attempts at kettling all those present were made. These all failed due to people's willingness to push through, combined with the evident unfamiliarity that the Danish police had with this tactic. The police seemed a far cry from the efficient force we had witnessed in the previous days. The demonstration managed to manoeuvre itself to Christiania, the semi-autonomous space in Copenhagen, to celebrate a successful demonstration and await the CJA plenary session in the evening where Naomi Klein, Michael Hardt and CJA spokesperson Tadzio Mueller would be speaking.

When the time came the space was full to bursting. Naomi Klein, the main attraction for many in the room, discussed the potential of climate reparations to the Global South helping to undermine current international power relations. Michael Hardt, co-author, with Toni Negri, of books such as Empire and Multitude, delivered a brief talk about the concept of the Common and attempted, in a slightly more complicated than necessary way, to argue that ecology and anti-capitalism, or communism as Hardt referred to it, were inherently connected. The current problematics visible in the relationship between ecology and communism were, he argued, false problems which could be theoretically bridged. Tadzio Mueller rounded up by discussing the role of the COP-15 in providing outlets for capital accumulation and also in producing political legitimacy for social elites. In the open floor discussion afterwards the topic of violence was, once again, brought up. It was encouraging to witness most in the room accepting a diversity of tactics, but one which was applied pragmatically. Most seemed to agree that militancy was acceptable, but only in specific circumstances. The Reclaim Power Action on Wednesday, where CJA would attempt to enter the conference centre and hold a peoples meeting, would insist on remaining non-violent.

We then went for a few beers in Christiania to celebrate the successful demo and toast the successful future of a climate justice movement we may just have witnessed a glimpse of. In Copenhagen, away from our familiar UK context, alliances which had seemed impossible began to look realisable. Could this potential be fulfilled? This was rudely interrupted by a confrontation outside. Burning barricades and stones weren't enough to stop the police

locking Christiania down. Taking this as our que to leave we slipped out into yet another dark, cold Danish evening and started our long journey across the city to home.

Tuesday 15th

Today was quiet day spent preparing for tomorrow. Everybody was very nervous. Once again in the evening the meeting was dominated by native English speakers, the majority of which were from the Climate Camp. Once again the radical, autonomous left were conspicuous by their absence. Rumours had it that the Italian group "Ya Basta", famous for their use of padded suits in Genoa, would be making an appearance. We would later find out that the bike bloc had had their machine confiscated by the police. As we settled into our sleeping bags that evening no-one was quite sure what would happen the next day.

Wednesday 16th

We woke at six in the morning to find the police waiting at both front and back doors. Staying at a city council provided crash space comes with its own downside. After a session of Jedi mind tricks for beginners, 'no, we're not the protestors your looking for', we were on a bus and on the way to the demonstration. All the major bridges had police stationed on them and we were all taken off the bus once or twice each and searched.

When we arrived at the meet up spot it was clear that the demo wasn't as big as we thought it would be. We would later find out that an autonomous group had been preventatively detained at what they had been told would be a legal assembly point. This deprived the action of some of its most experienced members. We arrived at the gate and people tried to force through, being stopped only by the liberal use of batons and pepper spray. A bridge made of inflatable mattresses emerged from various backpacks and the demo moved to support this. During this time part of the bike bloc managed to break police lines and, using their bikes, form a screen in front of us. One person even managed to use their bike to disable a police truck. After losing a truck and being faced with determined lines of people and a sea of media camera's the police decided to allow us the road, happy to arrest those that managed to cross the inflatable bridge into the waiting arms of the police. The peoples' assembly was held on the road outside the Bella centre. We would later hear that delegates and NGO representatives from inside the conference were beaten and refused the right to join the conference. This action had been the centre piece for many over the week yet we had failed to get into the grounds. During the walk back into town undercover police managed to snatch a prominent German AntiFa member and after he was rapidly driven away we decided to slip through the police lines and make our way to find some food. We would later see the demonstration, lined with police, walk past what the Copenhagen council (and Coca-Cola adverts) had labelled Hopenhagen, a square full of stalls selling "green" motorbikes and eco-holidays. The image seemed strangely resonant. Wandering the centre looking for somewhere to eat we met several groups of people who mentioned, in code, that "something" might be happening tonight. Needless to say that something never happened.

Thursday 17th

Thursday was a much needed rest day. In the evening we headed over to the CJA debrief. Opinion seemed divided over whether the day was a success or not. Differences were still emerging. As the meeting was winding to a close and preparations were being made for it to reconvene the next day, someone made the case for us to stay on and keep talking due to the fact that this room represented a geographical diversity that would be hard to replicate. When it was mentioned that people would be flying back to Latin America the next day a tut and mumbled criticism was heard from one British person. It seems that no circumstances are acceptable to avoid the aviation embargo placed upon those with a moral conscious by the UK anti-aviation movement. Most of the people in the room looked very confused at this comment and the conversation moved swiftly on.

The CJA debrief continued the next day but I was unable to attend. As far as I can tell nothing concrete was proposed. A cynic might suggest that the counter-mobilisation mirrored that in the Bella centre, a disappointing turn-out where little beyond principles was agreed to. Hopefully this will be proved wrong and hopefully it will not take until November in Mexico for this to be demonstrated.

Homeward Bound!

Tired and suffering from (mild) cabin fever, we set off back home. Trying to unravel the personal experiences from a rational analysis of the political outcomes of the counter summit was proving difficult. Returning home and diving into the media frenzy for eulogising the summit it became clear that the counter-mobilisation was a lot smaller than had been expected by many of us. In a broader context, COP-15 ended a year of radical politics dominated by counter-summits. Broadly speaking, none of these, with perhaps the exception of Strasbourg, could be described as total successes. The G20, the G8 in Italy and Copenhagen were all underwhelming in terms of numbers that attended and the political success we achieved at the G20 and G8 were certainly limited. Whilst it remains to be seen whether the networks and relationships produced in Copenhagen will yield positive results it is clear that there are big differences between the political traditions involved in the climate justice movement. The lack of the European radical left, the strange portrayal of indigenous struggles and the ways in which voices from the South are incorporated will all need to be discussed in the coming months if we wish to strengthen the foundations which were clearly laid in Copenhagen. In conclusion it is impossible to present even a minor percentage of the stories which we heard or experienced whilst in Copenhagen that could convey the complex, contradictory, yet somehow still strangely inspiring nature of the event.

Ben Lear lives in Manchester and is still deeply perplexed about his Copenhagen experience. Topics he has written on include environmental politics, student movements and post-politics.

an interview with erik swyngedouw

Erik, you are a human geographer and former student of David Harvey. Does a Marxist human geography have anything to contribute to the understanding of anthropogenic climate change?

The Marxist analysis is based on the view that any form of social organisation and dynamics has to be understood by looking at the social ways through which the physical environment is transformed.

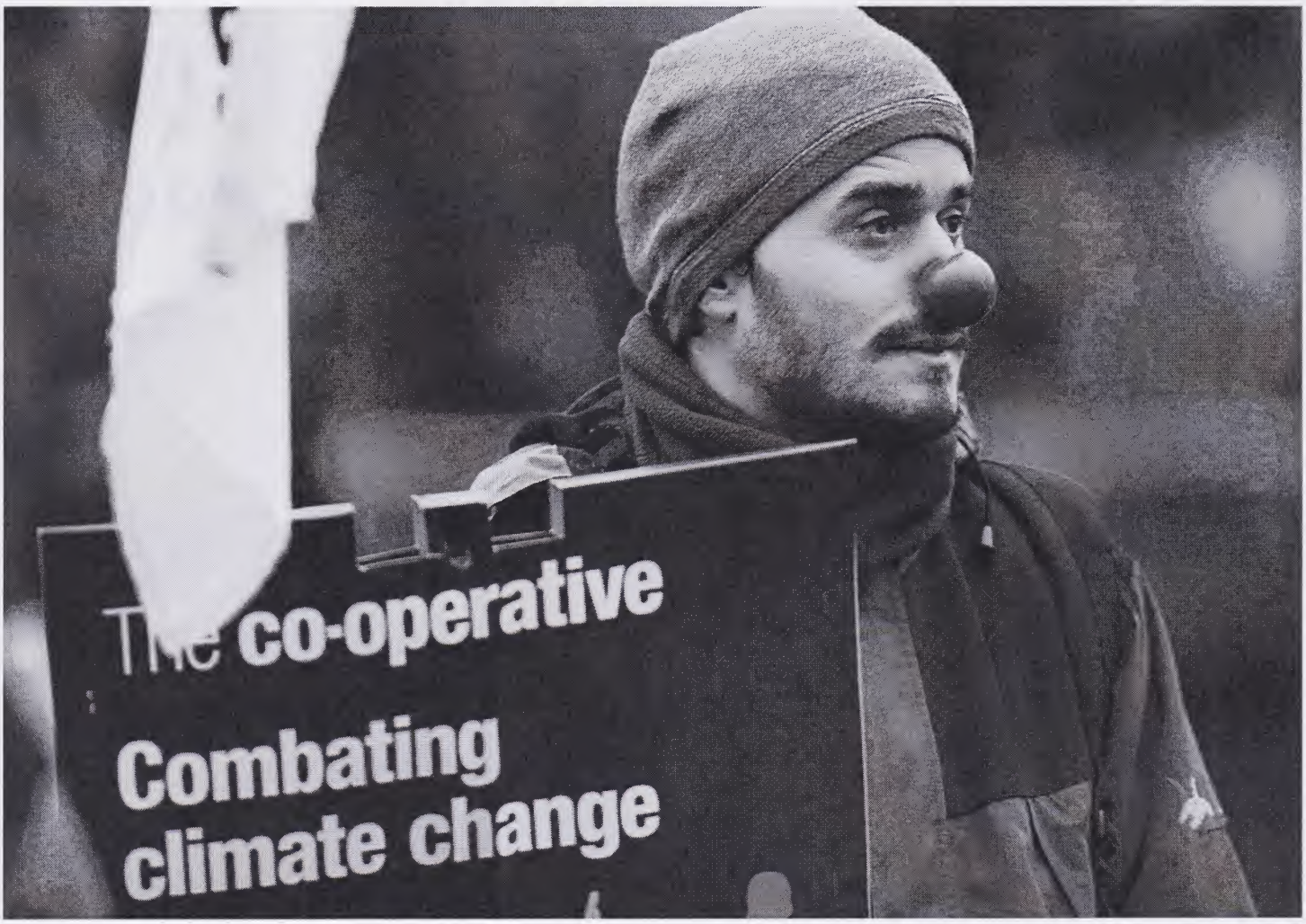
This often is forgotten by Marxists; that fundamentally Marxism is a historical materialism, meaning that it tries to understand the socio-physical ways in which society is organised and in which society is changed. In capitalism then, the social transformation of the physical environment takes very specific forms, to the extent that capitalism is based on the continuous reinvestment of surplus in the production process. Any kind of capitalist economy necessarily needs an expansion and a deepening of the physical resource base to sustain its activity.

So in that sense - a growth economy, and capitalism is by definition a growth-based economy - necessitates the continuous expansion and the mobilisation of physical resources. In that sense, climate change, or in other words the transformation of oil and other fossil resources into atmospheric CO2, is an integral part of the dynamic of capitalism. You cannot possibly begin to understand the climate predicament without understanding the socio-ecological dynamic of capitalism.

I would argue that Marxism offers the best entry into that analysis.

Your work has to do with the spaces and localities of governance. Do you think the rhetoric of 'man-made global warming' is shifting the sites where authority is exercised and power yielded?

This is a difficult question. It is obviously the case that the discourse of climate change is organised, politically, in very specific ways and in very specific places. Take for example the United States, or the UK for that matter; there is now a consensus on virtually every geographical scale. Whether I look at the city of Manchester, or whether I look at the UK as a whole, whether I look at the city of New York, or at the United States as a whole - there is the political consensus among the enlightened elites at least that climate change is a serious problem.



Very few people disagree with that, so the key challenge today for the elites is how to make sure that capitalism as a socio-economic and political system can continue while at the same time making sure that the climate evolves such that it does not lead to disastrous consequences. I would argue that this combination is impossible to achieve. That is clearly what most, at least Western powers, are trying to do.

Is this what the COP 15 summit in Copenhagen was about?

Absolutely! The failure of Copenhagen to me was the clearest expression of the difficulty, if not the impossibility, of making an impossible alliance between those who want to save the planet and prevent ecological Armageddon on the one hand and those who wish to make sure that civilisation 'as we know it' can be sustained. Of course civilisation as we know it is a capitalist civilisation. I would argue that it is impossible to square these two. We can not sustain this civilisation while at the same time assuring the save evolution of the climate. That has to be recognised, because the impossibility of achieving these two objectives has led among other things to disaster in Copenhagen.

You use the term 'post-politics' to describe how there is a consensual element to this impossible alliance that you speak of, how fundamental antagonisms can't be seen any more. We're thinking of the Wave demonstration in London, for example, which seemed to lend support to our leaders to save the planet for us. To what extent is this an instance of such consensual politics?

Very much so. The post-political argument revolves around the view that democracy, understood as a political system that permits the negotiation of antagonistic or radically different positions, has been displaced by a consensus-based arrangement. The classic example of that is indeed the climate change and environmental issue. People from a variety of different political reservations all agree that these are issues that require urgent action and they usually also agree that a solution can be found through a form of consensual, participation-based negotiation.

My argument is that such a consensus-based negotiation, such as in Copenhagen, is a classic example of an attempt to come up with a consensually-established and negotiated solution. Such a consensual order, I would argue, is the exact antithesis of what a global democracy is. A democracy is of course a condition that permits radically opposing views about the social, ecological orders of society to be expressed.

If we look at the environmental argument then, there is no proper political dimension to it. The proper political dimension is, as far as I'm concerned, displaced onto other terrains. In the case of climate change the focus is on CO2 and how to handle this. I think this is mistaken, not withstanding the fact of course that CO2 matters and that CO2 is indeed a key element in producing global warming. I would however insist that if we want to do something about global warming, about CO2 and about the injustices associated with it we have to focus on the political–social debates and not on CO2 per se.

At the COP 15 protests, some activists adopted the message that 'climate change is not an environmental issue'. Is this a way then to break out of the post-political dilemma by saying that 'climate change is a social issue'?

Yes, I like this sort of argumentation. Climate change is a social issue and the only way in which the climate or any other socio-ecological process should be approached is by searching for the social and political.

For the larger NGOs and politicians, climate change is a problem that needs to be managed and policed. It is about science and finding technological solutions and policing human behaviour. But for an anti-capitalist movement the question is how to break out of the paralysis of consensus. In Copenhagen, some people wanted to achieve a complete rupture with the official negotiations by blockading them or by attacking police and government buildings. But could an answer not lie in the democratisation of science?

On the science debate I think the first thing that needs to be done is to de-politicise the science – and not the other way round. What we see now is a form of politicisation of science. I think this is highly problematic. I am a scientist myself and I believe in science, in other words, I believe in matters of fact. That is, for example, I do not argue with the science of climate change. However, what I do dispute and object to is that scientists, who correctly state that CO2 is responsible for climate change and correctly state that human intervention is partly responsible for that increase in CO2, then add that – because of that fact – urgent and immediate social and political action is needed to bring CO2 down.

«Copenhagen is a classic example of an attempt to come up with a consensually-established and negotiated solution. Such a consensual order is the exact antithesis of what a global democracy is»

At that moment the scientists enter the domain of the political, without properly acknowledging that that is what they're doing. So I would argue for the de-politicisation of science and for the politicisation of the environmental argument.

But scientists are now integral to the climate movement. Is it even conceivable that scientists who unearth the facts behind climate change would not construct a political argument based on this?

The political argument, I would argue, should be based on a proper political foundation. For example, a properly political argument is the demand for equality. So a proper democratic, progressive demand as a political activist, my main foundation of being a political activist, is to demand equality; social and environmental equality. That demand does not rely on the fact of climate change. That is a demand that relies on political positionality. That is what I mean by politicisation. A political argument has to be based on a political foundation and not on a matter of fact. That does not mean of course that these matters of fact do not matter. Obviously it is the case, I would argue, that if I make a political claim for social, cultural equality then I have to contain the condition of CO2, the climate, environment etc. in that context. But that demand does not rely on the fact of climate change.

What I object to is when scientists make a political demand - that is to bring CO2 down – on the basis of the matter of fact that CO2 is going up in the atmosphere and is causing all of these other issues. That is not a political statement that is a depoliticising statement. That is a depoliticising statement exactly because these are the statements that lead people like Obama, myself and George Bush to agree. I mean who is out there who disagrees with the fact that the climate matters? It is exactly this form of politicisation of facts that leads you to the situation of post-political, consensual management.

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Iain McKay

mutualism, yes and no

Mutualism is a libertarian form of market socialism. It is most associated with Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, the first person to call himself an anarchist. However, he did not invent the term but rather picked it up from workers in Lyon when he stayed there in the 1840s. Mutualism reached the peak of its influence during the Paris Commune of 1871 which applied Proudhon's ideas on federalism and workers' co-operatives before being bloodily crushed.

Mutualism aims to create a system of self-employed workers and co-operatives honestly exchanging goods and services in a market without interest, rent, profit, landlords or capitalists. Rejecting social revolution, it aims to destroy capitalism and the state by means of reform – a combination of more just and more efficient economic institutions (mutual banks and co-operatives) and pressurising the state from outside to enact appropriate reforms.

Revolutionary anarchism developed after Proudhon's death in 1865, but it shares many of the same ideas. It takes his critique of property as a source of exploitation ("property is theft") and domination ("property is despotism"), his analysis of the state as an instrument of class domination and destroyer of freedom, his arguments for decentralisation, economic and social self-management, and socio-economic federalism. It rejects his reformist means as well as support for markets in a free society.

The notion that credit and producer co-operatives would displace capitalism is rejected by most anarchists. Following Bakunin, we see the need for revolutionary action to end capitalism. This is because of the vast advantage that the capitalist class enjoys against the working class in terms of wealth, not to mention the support (open or hidden, but always active) of the state. The fight is too unequal for success to be expected. Instead, anarchists turned to the labour movement, strikes and other forms of collective direct action and solidarity to change society.

Even with the outside pressure of the people on the state which Proudhon thought was necessary to force it towards meaningful reforms, it is unlikely that it will transcend its class role and act in the public good. Revolutionary anarchists recognised that if there were a reform movement strong enough to pressurise the state in such a way it would also be strong enough to abolish the state – and the capitalism it exists to defend. It must also be noted that, assuming its means were viable, Proudhon saw the achievement of anarchy as a matter of centuries. The current eco-crisis does not permit such a timescale.

The key area of disagreement in terms of vision is that unlike other forms of anarchism, mutualism keeps a modified version of market exchange. Some, particularly Marxists, reject this vision as simply "self-managed capitalism." Ironically, this repeats the neo-liberal assertion that "markets" equal capitalism, so downplaying wage labour (and the domination and exploitation that goes with it). Moreover,

A mutual climate

Iain McKay spoke on anarchism (and anarchist economic theory) at the recent 'Participatory Economics' conference of the Radical Routes network (of housing and workers cooperatives and social centres) in Conway Hall. Among the topics discussed here was Proudhon's theory of mutualism. This theory is echoed in the practices and beliefs of many of those who advocate cooperative production and living as a strategy for radical social and ecological change. The idea of mutualism is embraced in many different parts of society from the Co-operative Group to its more explicitly anarchist expression within the Radical Roots network. Mutualism is founded in the ideals of the 'honest' exchange of goods and services in a market free from bosses, profit, etc that is based on self-employment and workers co-operatives.

Arguments for mutualism as the basis of radical political practice were also given a strong platform at the Climate Camp at Blackheath last year (even if not consciously so). Alternative economies, let schemes and alternative money were discussed by a Green Party spokesperson and a climate camper celebrated co-operatives as viable alternatives to current forms of working, living and trading. This they are and the Radical Roots network has been proof of the amazing networks and buying opportunities that co-operatives provide for many people. And the plenary at the climate camp provided a long due theoretical deconstruction of the current economic system.

However as Iain McKay, author of An Anarchist FAQ, argues here, while such principles can effectively govern alternative means of living and working for activists, they are severely limiting if the goal is to form/promote a revolutionary and antagonistic perspective. As Iain argues, we should not shut out or forget the rebellious, negating element of our critiques. Often it is criticism of the status quo without the need to offer alternatives that serves a more fundamental break with the structures that can trap us.

A review of mutualist theory highlights the limitations of mutualism; here Iain takes us through this theory and some of the problems inherent in it. This article is intended to provide the background to mutualist and anarchist philosophy enabling us to practice and participate in 'alternative' ways of living whilst recognising the antagonistic element to our political action that is necessary if we are to work toward radical social change.

this is not the case. As Marx himself repeatedly noted, this would be a different mode of production than capitalism as it was not based on wage-labour.

Anarchists and the market

While mutualism is not "self-managed" capitalism, it does not mean that this form of libertarian socialism is without flaws. Communist-anarchists argue that there are problems with markets as such, which are independent of, or made worse by, capitalism. It is these problems which make most anarchists hostile to the market (even one of competing self-managed workplaces) and so we desire a (libertarian) communist society.

At its most basic, markets soon result in impersonal forces ("market forces") which ensure that the people in the economy do what is required in order for it to function. While the market is usually presented as a regime of freedom where no one forces anyone to do anything, where we freely exchange with others as we see fit, the reality is different as the market usually ensures that people act in ways opposite to what they desire or forces them to accept "free agreements" which they may not actually desire. Wage labour under capitalism is the most obvious example of this, but survival on the market can drive even the best intended co-operative to act in anti-social and anti-ecological ways simply to survive.

Operating in a market means submitting to the profit criterion. However much workers might want to employ social criteria in their decision making, they cannot. To ignore "profitability" would cause their firm to go bankrupt. Markets systematically reward anti-social activity as firms which impose externalities can lower prices and be rewarded by an increased market share as a result – particularly as it is impossible to determine whether a low cost reflects actual efficiency or a willingness to externalise costs. So the price mechanism blocks information required for sensible decision making (that something costs £5 does not tell you how much pollution it causes or the conditions of the workplace which created it). While there will be a reduced likelihood for co-operatives to pollute their own neighbourhoods, the competitive pressures and rewards would still be there and it seems unlikely that they will be ignored, particularly if survival on the market is at stake.

The market can also block the efficient use of resources. Eco-friendly technology, at least initially, is often more expensive than its rivals and while, over the long term, it is more efficient the high initial price ensures that most people continued to use the less efficient technologies and so waste resources. Thus we see investment in (say) wind energy ignored in favour of one-use and polluting energy sources. Any market system would be infused with short-termism, as co-operatives which are not would incur costs which their less far-sighted competitors would not – particularly as it would still be dependent on finding the money to do so and may still increase the price of their finished product so harming their market position – and survival.

Even if we assume that self-managed firms

resist the economic temptations and pressures, any market system is also marked by a continuing need to expand production and consumption. In terms of environmental impact, a self-managed firm must still ensure sales exceed costs in order to survive and so the economy must grow and expand into the environment. As well as placing pressure on the planet's ecology, this need to grow impacts on human activity as it also means that market forces ensure that work continually has to expand. Value needs to be created, and that can only be done by labour and so even a non-capitalist market system will see work dominate people's lives and broader (non-monetary) measures of welfare such as quality of life being sacrificed. Such a regime may, perhaps, be good for material wealth but it is not great for people or the planet.

That self-managed firms would adjust to market forces by increasing hours, working more intensely, allocating resources to accumulating equipment rather than leisure time or consumption can be seen in co-operatives under capitalism. This is why many socialists call this "self-exploitation" (although this is somewhat misleading, as there is no exploitation in the sense of owners appropriating unpaid labour). Economic pressures will increasingly encroach on any higher ethical goals in order to survive on the market, be "efficient" and grow.

Market forces, in short, produce collectively irrational behaviour as a result of atomistic individual actions. Moreover, a market of self-managed firms would still suffer from booms and slumps as the co-operatives response to changes in prices would still result in over-production and over-investment. While the lack of non-labour income would help reduce the severity of the business cycle, it seems unlikely to eliminate it totally. Equally, many of the problems of market-increased uncertainty and the destabilising aspects of price signals are just as applicable to all markets, including post-capitalist ones.

«While mutualism is not 'self-managed' capitalism, it does not mean that this form of libertarian socialism is without flaws»

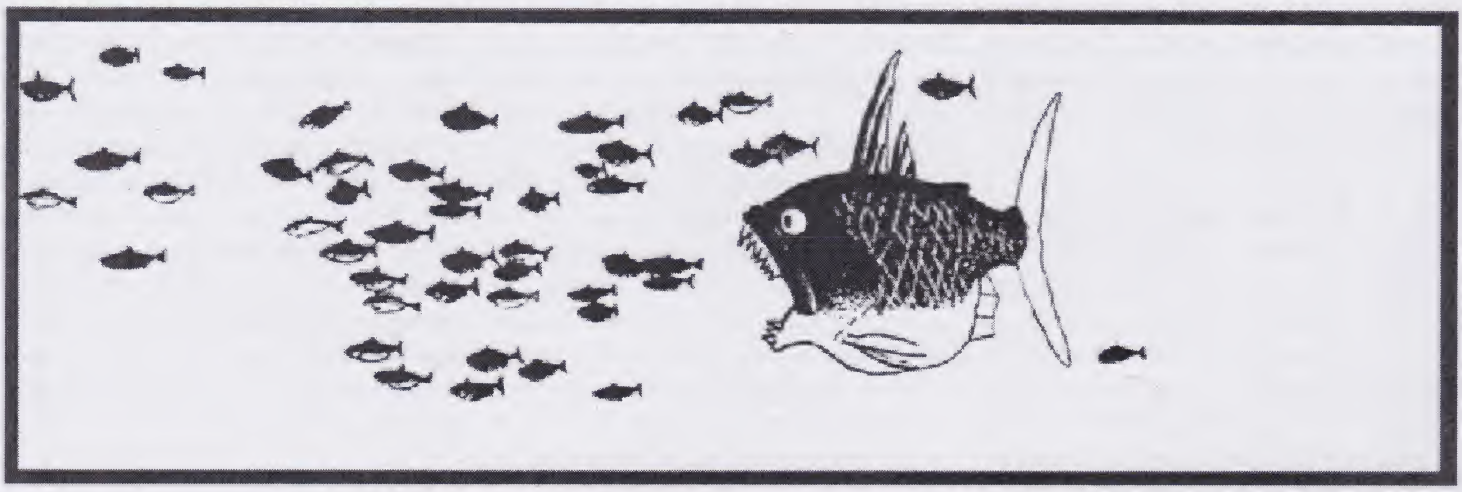
While an anarchist society would be created with people driven by a sense of solidarity and desire for equality, markets tend to erode those feelings. Mutualism could even degenerate back into capitalism as any inequalities that exist between co-operatives would be increased by competition, forcing weaker co-operatives to fail and so creating a pool of workers with nothing to sell but their labour. If the inequalities become so great that the new rich become so alienated from the rest of society they could recreate wage-labour and, by necessity, a state to enforce their desire for property in land and the means of production against public opinion.

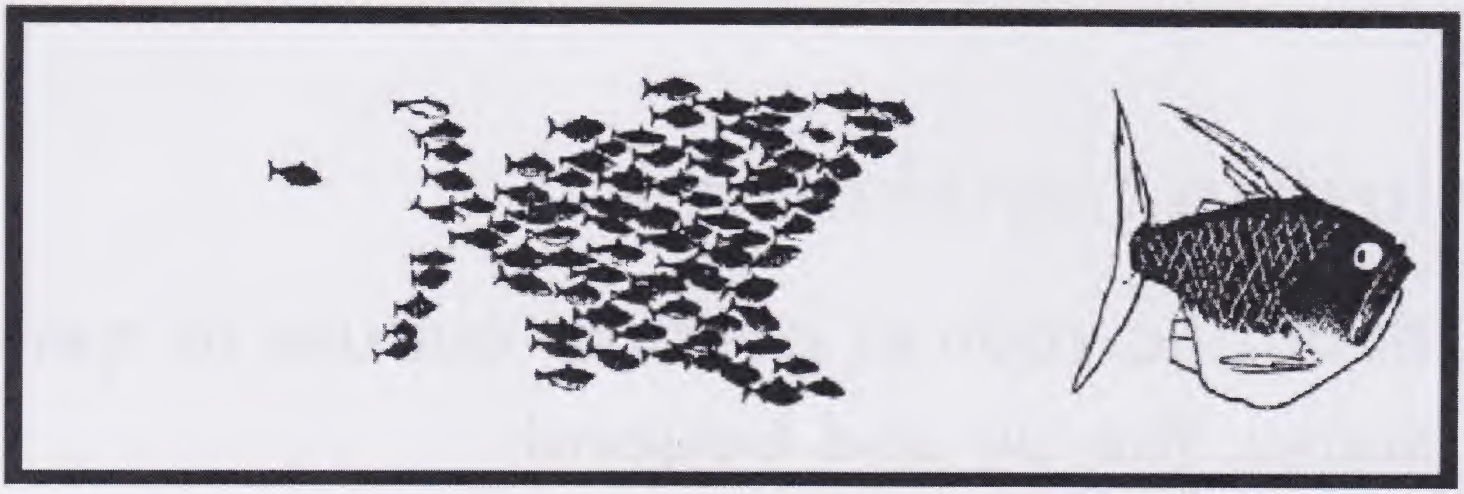
Communist Anarchism

So communist-anarchists fear that while not having bosses, capitalists and landlords would mitigate some of the irrationalities associated with capitalism, it will not totally remove all of them. While the market may be free, people would not be.

In conclusion then, communist-anarchists argue that even non-capitalist markets would result in everyone being so busy competing to further their "self-interest" that they would lose sight of what makes life worth living and so harm their actual interests. The pressures of competing may easily result in short-term and narrow interests taking precedence over richer, deeper needs and aspirations which a libertarian communist system could allow to flourish by providing the social institutions by which individuals can discuss their joint interests, formulate them and act to achieve them. That is, even non-capitalist markets would result in people simply working long and hard to survive rather than living. This would filter into our relationships with the planet as well, with the drive of economic pressures soon overcoming hopes of living in harmony within viable eco-systems.

Mutualists are well aware of the corrosive effects of market forces, tempering them with solidarity via an agro-industrial federation and a just price to reduce market fluctuations and uncertainty. However, co-operatives will still need to survive in the market and so are under pressure to





conform to its dictates. In short, bosses act as they do under capitalism in part because markets force them to. Getting rid of bosses need not eliminate all the economic pressures which influence their decisions and these could force groups of workers to act in similar ways. Thus keeping markets would undermine many of the benefits which people sought when they ended capitalism.

Then there is the ethical issue. Market income does not reflect needs and a just society would recognise this. Many needs cannot be provided by markets (public goods and efficient health care, most obviously). All market decisions are crucially conditioned by the purchasing power – not everyone can work (the sick, the very old, children and so forth) and, for those who can, personal circumstances may impact on their ability to labour. We need to recognise that the needs of the individual do not always correspond to their deeds. While economic distress will be less in a non-capitalist market system, it still would exist as would the fear of it and the market system is the worst one for allocating resources when purchasing power is unequally distributed.

So there are certain features of markets that are undesirable regardless of whether they are capitalist or not. This is why most anarchists today argue for no markets, for the abolition of money or equivalents. In short: no wage labour AND no wages system ("From each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs").

«alternatives such as co-operatives will never transform capitalism. In fact, rather than change the system it is far more likely that the system will change them as they adapt to market forces in order to survive»

To conclude, mutualism and communist-anarchism share many things in common. Both can agree on the need to build alternatives such as co-operatives in the here and now. However, for the latter this is not enough in itself. While they may make life better under capitalism and show that we do not need to live like cogs in the machine of economic growth, they will never transform capitalism. In fact, rather than change the system it is far more likely that the system will change them as they adapt to market forces in order to survive.

What we need to do is to create a culture of resistance in our workplaces and communities, a movement which, while fighting capitalism, seeks to replace it. In short, mutualism is not enough – we need revolutionary social movements.

Iain McKay is the principle author of the Anarchist FAQ and regular contributor to Freedom newspaper. For more on Mutualism see "The Economics of Anarchy" (Black Flag, no. 230) and section I of An Anarchist FAQ (www.anarchistfaq.org.uk)

Jan Digger

lost in translation -

debating radical political culture in germany, the uk and beyond

The following is a letter to SHIFT from a reader and activist based in the UK and Germany. It follows some of the comparisons that have been made in previous articles regarding radical theory in the UK and abroad...

Since its beginning, Shift Magazine has been in some kind of dialogue with the radical left in Germany, infusing the current theoretical discourses from over here into UK activist theory. However little has been said about the activist practice in Germany, its political culture and how it may compare to that in the UK. While I am myself regularly shifting between projects and actions in the UK and Germany I felt quite happy seeing what could be loosely called "anti-national theory" entering the activist stage in the UK. Just as over here, in the UK I was frequently surprised by quite shallow and foreshortened political positions. However theory itself does not say anything about political practice. Yes, there is a "strong autonomous Antifa movement" in Germany but the question is whether it furthers an emancipating political culture and practice beyond or based on its interesting theoretical output. Looking at the political culture in Germany generally and its parallels with that of the German radical left more particularly (especially that of Climate Camp 2008 in Hamburg and the autonomous movement), this is highly questionable. Therefore, an inter-activist dialogue about this issue is absolutely vital.

There have been innumerable occasions when I spent time with friends in political projects over in the UK, where I thought: "These are so absolutely simple and obvious principles. Why don't they get it done over here in Germany?" Hence there are a couple of differences (somewhat intertwined) between the political cultures, which are by no means absolute, but need to be addressed:

1. Organising Ourselves

Movement leaders, closed conspiratorial groups and activist cliques institutionalise and appropriate the movement, leading to exclusion and alienation instead of open, empowering and transparent processes; monopolising power, resources, skills and knowledge instead of sharing them freely and actively. Both of these are obviously practices many of us would deem contradictory to our politics. However these are commonly seen in the (radical) left in Germany and beyond. Attac, solid' (youth group of The Left party), autonomous groups and more unaligned elitist movement cliques appear wherever a hot topic emerges (G8 2007, Climate Camp 2008, COP15 2009) and seem to push these politics, while the process and media groups seem to be pre-determined for this. Another alternative is to create completely unaccountable parallel structures all together.

2. Making Decisions

If it comes to seemingly "accountable" decision making the "plenary" is the most widely used "method" in Germany. It's not quite defined but ask a leftist here and he/she will tell you it sucks. As there are mostly no hand-signals, no impartial and

well-trained facilitators and no proper decentralisation, it takes ages whilst the rhetorically most eloquent and loudest get their way on the agenda and hence the aforementioned informal hierarchies determine the outcome. It's a joy to see that in the UK, activists seem to get closer to the ideal: making decision on the lowest level, with those who feel affected with a clear and horizontal decision making process, like well-facilitated consensus.

3. Direct Action

Choice 1: Antifa-Demo in town. Frightening barking of some kind of incomprehensible slogan, firecrackers exploding in a crowd of potentially interested folks, the banners shielded by heavy police lines. No flyers at hand. Choice 2: "BlockX". Like a herd of sheep you are steered towards the fence surrounding the summit, not really knowing what you are doing, while at the same time the press speaker of Attac or some movement "leader" explains why "the movement" is so great. And if the "leader" gets detained he/she will get an exclusive, personified solidarity campaign. No real choice, ey? How about thousands of people in small affinity groups, well-trained beforehand, swarming around stinging the system here and there, wherever they are, with their well-prepared blockades, lock-ons, occupations, sabotage or whatever? Sadly far from reality in Germany where empowerment all too often seems to be a foreign term. I am looking towards the UK climate action movement and gain a little hope...

4. Communication and Education

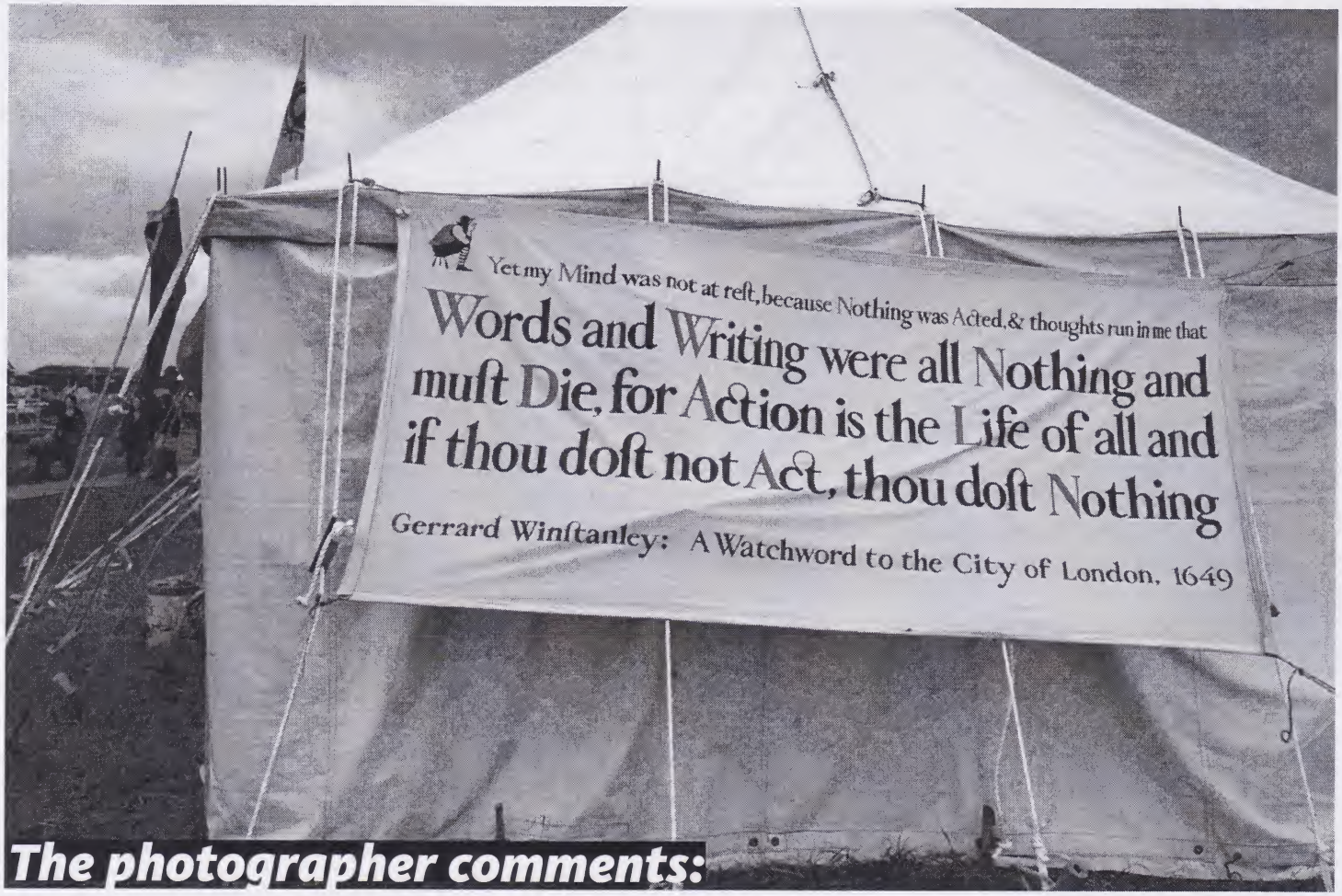
Sometimes it seems as if the (radical) left in Germany recruits itself mostly from white middle-class sociology students (like me, hehe). What this leads to is an acute academic intellectualism. When reading flyers, manifestos, books or simply talking to us, people simply do not understand. And even within the scene, those who can talk the smartest gain the highest esteem. We have to break it down into simple bits, pick people up where they are and give out our radical, little folk zines. Thanks UK for this piece of D.I.Y.!

5. Setting up Temporary Spaces of Resistance

While we are at it. Have you ever seen a private business pulling up a marquee with a Caterpillar on a Camp for Climate Action? And Dixie toilets? And essentially important Diesel generators? I have! Climate Camp 2008 in Germany. And all this shit was organised by self-declared experts. How about self-organisation? D.I.Y.? Collectively erecting this space of resistance? Pre-figurative politics in infrastructure? Little chance you get this over here. I am really happy to know that there are alternatives over there in the UK, like the Activist Tat Collective...

6. Modesty and Self-Reflection

I believe modesty and critical self-reflection would do us quite good. All too often there is self-glorification, the delusion of false unity and, in order to achieve this, the formation of alliances for exactly this sake: pushing your brand if you are Attac or Solid or satisfying your ego or personal



The photographer comments:

"Well yes, Gerrard, but I can't help being argumentative and thinking if no-one had written down that you said that, we would never know. You nOOb. I'm a shameless apologist for words. I like them very much."

career if you were summoned to be the "movement's leader". An undogmatic, open and public culture is completely absent here in Germany. Mainly because it would challenge the mentioned privileged and their political practices.

7. Connecting Struggles

"Radical ecology?" "No, sorry I am an Antifa." Get what I mean? Lately I have been on an activist permaculture course in Devon. Queer-feminism, radical ecology, anti-racism, anti-capitalism and so on. It was all there. Shared passionately by all. Of course we have our preferences. But how absurd would the common German practice seem; to pick whatever hot topic there is (Globalisation, G8, Climate Change) to push your own label-identity-politics or personal movement-esteem? Even worse if you don't even have a connection or passion to the issue itself anymore.

8. Autonomous Spaces

Compare an Autonomous Centre in Germany with a Social Centre in the UK. When stepping into the Common Place in Leeds I feel a warm and welcoming atmo-

sphere and the attempt to be inclusive to the neighbourhood and the local community. Maybe also a space to charge up if you're emotionally fucked. An autonomous squat in Germany: smoky, dark, black, dirty, lame tags and graffiti all over. The neighbourhood mostly wants to get rid of this "dirty blob" and the extremely rigid norms of a restrictive subculture wear out activists and newcomers a like. Maybe we need a norm to question all norms?

9. Towards Utopia

"Wrong life cannot be lived rightly". Says Adorno. And so does the great part of the (radical) left in Germany. Radical everyday alternatives as practiced in workshops and the build-up of the Camp for Climate Action have a hard time here. But isn't that exactly what we need? Similar to a reflection on COP15 I would say: What if... we mobilised 100,000 people to act more locally in trans-local solidarity, to provide much needed help to create new and support existing anti-capitalist ways of production, approaches of relating to each other, of actively resisting and creating autonomous spaces for all to skill-share and educate each other in order to imagine and approach the utopia of a liberated society.

In the end this is what this whole article is about. Striving towards our utopia of a political culture and practice.

Glimmers of Hope

And if it was not for all the glimmers of hope that I personally often find in the UK, the political culture and practice that I experienced in Copenhagen the last weeks would force me to look into a bleak future. With few exceptions there was everything but a move towards the goals formulated in this article. But I guess everybody can do the balance themselves.

Lastly it remains to be noted that of course none of the statements above is absolute. Maybe I have dramatised and exaggerated. But for me the tendencies are clear. Of course it's not black and white. UK is no paradise and Germany is not hell. If you drop by get in touch and check out the anti-nuclear resistance, GMO-field squatters, occupations of animal-lab construction sites or woodland protest-camps against airport expansion or coal-fired heating-pipelines. To name just a few nice little projects.

So... Be on the watch, wherever you are.

Jan Digger. Human being, anarchist, gardener and activist. Searching and learning. jhc@riseup.net

Raphael Schlembach

griffin on question time

8 million viewers saw Nick Griffin's appearance on Question Time last October; many more were involved in conversations about it, or read about it in newspapers or on the internet. By all means, the BBC platform that was offered to the chairman was a national, if not nationalist, event. You might have joined in the drinking games that were suggested on online forums and blogs: drink one finger every time 'Evil Nick' mentions immigration, two fingers every time he mentions Dunkirk or Churchill, and down your pint if he accuses someone of being a Stalinist or ultra-leftist. You might have taken pleasure at Griffin's unwillingness to explain his views on the Holocaust, to denounce the KKK or to distance himself from the Third Reich. Ha, those Unite against Fascism (UAF) placards outside the BBC television studio are telling the truth: the BNP is a Nazi party!

Or is it? You might have also observed the awkward silence from the audience when Griffin spoke out against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan or mentioned the economic crisis. Is this not the opinion of a liberal lefty? Are the BNP an anti-war party? And how do we explain Griffin's insistence that he is a hate-figure in British neo-Nazi circles? Are those UAF slogans mistaken after all?

I offer here some comments on three of Griffin's remarks on Question Time that seemed to conflict with the UAF understanding of fascism – and that most left-wing commentators chose to ignore. They seemed to silence the Question Time audience as much as Griffin's most vocal opponents on the left. Yet, they contribute to an understanding of the modern BNP that is vital to anti-fascist campaigners.

Nazis vs. the BNP

Outside the television studio, UAF had called for a protest against Griffin's appearance on Question Time with placards declaring 'The BNP is a Nazi party'. But inside, Griffin insisted that he is not a Nazi – or at least not any more. Who is right? Probably neither. To be sure, there are neo-Nazi elements within the BNP, in terms of membership, policies and international allies. Yet, Nazism is not the defining characteristic of the BNP's agenda. In fact, Griffin is right when he says that he does not count many friends amongst the UK's small neo-Nazi scene; even though this is statement which left UAF supporters stunned. So for once the (otherwise rowdy) Question Time audience was reduced to silence when Griffin explained:

"I am the most loathed man in Britain in the eyes of Nazis. There are Nazis in Britain and they loathe me because I have brought the British National party from the frankly anti-semitic and racist organisation, into the only party which in the clashes between Israel and Gaza supported Israel's right to deal with Hamas terrorists."

The short episode where Griffin struggled to balance an attack and a defence of KKK founder Duke does not appear to have gained him any more credit amongst neo-Nazi anti-Semites, as comments left on the white supremacist online forum Stormfront suggest. One forum member, with the user name 'Ethelred' stated:

"I thought it was quite a bad performance

by Griffin in comparison to his other TV appearances. I didn't like his attack on Duke but at least he got the truth out by saying Duke's KKK was a peaceful non-violent one. It reminded me of the old Griffin – a good nationalist and on our side but after [Bonnie Greer] interrupted him with something that implied she was some sort of expert on the KKK just because she's American-born [...] he seemed to retract that unfortunately and started attacking him."

Another Stormfront member commented:

"Nick cemented his position as a zionist mouthpiece with his support of Israel. Shame on him. He made us all look stupid by refusing to tackle the issues that matter and as for nudging and laughing with the black supremacist Greer, well I wanted to vomit. Why would you want to engage with that creature? ... Griffin taking the pee out of K.K.K. hoods, saying that he's not a "nazi". He singularly failed to mention why we are called racists and why it is wrong, he wouldn't go near the truth about the holocaust for fear of being called antisemitic, what a cowardly performance overall... Question time was a state sanctioned pantomime, with Nick being the tail end of the horse, firmly up the arse of Israel."

Griffin has indeed made a remarkable transformation from his earlier neo-Nazi leanings to a more moderate, albeit populist, nationalism. And he has taken the BNP with him on this trajectory. Under its previous leadership, headed by John Tyndall, the party did not just differ in its use of tactics which included a much more antagonistic street presence. There has also been a political shift.

Griffin began his career as a politician in the neo-Nazi National Front and was then instrumental in helping to prominence the ideas of the 'Third Position' movement, inspired notably by Italian neo-fascist Roberto Fiore. 'Third Position' politics is essentially a move away from traditional racism and white-supremacism, and replaces it with an ultra-nationalist belief in the separation and co-existence of races. As such, Griffin early on showed an interest in black separatism and national liberation movements. But Griffin struggled to find support for his Euro-fascist ideology in Britain and, as leader of the BNP, resorted back to a form of ultra-nationalist populism coupled with old-style racism to win over a broad range of followers. In Britain's neo-Nazi scene, he thus remains a controversial character who is mostly considered a sell-out.

Patriots vs. the war

It was another remark that Griffin dropped during the Question Time debate that most challenged the audience and his adversaries on the panel – when he suggested that the BNP was the only anti-war party represented.

On the BNP website Griffin makes this very clear: "The war is based on a series of grotesque lies, manufactured by the Labour and Tory party leadership. They claim that it is being fought to prevent terrorism. This is nonsense. Instead of preventing terrorism, the war there is actually encouraging it."

The BNP's anti-war stance has nothing to

do with the humble recognition of Britain's colonialist past. And certainly it's miles apart from the anti-Islamophobia position of the Stop the War Coalition. It has more to do with a brand of nationalism that the party's leadership have recently tried to push: ethno-nationalism, or ethno-pluralism.

Ethno-pluralism as a right-wing populist ideology is essentially an anti-immigration discourse that developed in the context of immigration to Europe from its former colonies in the 1960s. It attempts to describe and justify aggressive opposition to migrants as a 'natural defence' of one's 'indigenous' culture. Cultures are seen as static and hermetically-closed entities with a homogenous internal identity. Whilst ethno-pluralist ideology regards different cultures and identities as formally equal, they are also seen as incompatible.

This new form of racism, a racism without races, thus bases itself on a right to difference. Different cultures, ethnic groups and identities need to be defended from cultural globalisation, multi-culturalism and universalism. Cultural rights are not bestowed politically by the state, but are somehow derived 'naturally' – hence the emphasis on history and tradition. Ethno-pluralism has thus an air of 'anti-imperialism' about it.

If nations are to co-exist alongside each other in a 'natural' order, aggressive and expansionist wars have no role to play in nationalist politics. Griffin can therefore justify the BNP's opposition to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq not only with reference to the death toll amongst British soldiers but also as part of a politics that claims the sovereignty of nations over 'their' territory.

The BNP vs. Usury

None of this suggests any BNP sympathy towards Muslims or the Arab world. On the contrary, Islamophobia is what most defines the party and its supporters today. So it was even more remarkable when Griffin on Question Time began defending some elements of political Islam and combined this with the evening's only reference to the economic crisis:

"Islam does have some good points - it does not allow for usury and would not have allowed the banks to run riot the way they have."

Here Griffin attacked the banks, greed and the political centre, much like the populist left and parts of the mainstream do. And, he hails in Islam one character – the opposition to usury.

«where Griffin presents the BNP as a populist anti-greed, anti-sleaze and anti-war party this is entirely compatible with his version of ethno-pluralist nationalism»

Essentially, usury is lending money at interest. It was banned by the Catholic Church in the 12th century and also Islam is widely seen as demanding condemnation of the practice. Both the medieval European and the Islamic banking systems got around this by declaring loans to be investments (so the return is profit not interest) or by actually paying out less then the lending contract specifies, for example.

In common usage today, the term refers to the charging of unreasonably high rates of interest. What is more, it has historically become associated with Jews. Because of the (religious) laws in Europe and elsewhere that restricted interest charging to Christians, Jewish trade has often correlated with the sphere of money circulation.

Anti-Semitic imagery has traditionally attempted to create an analogy between Jews and money-lending. Fascist anti-globalisation ideology makes a distinction between industrial/productive capital and finance capital. The former is seen as honest, national and democratic. The 'secretive web' of financiers, speculators and capitalists, on the other hand, is characterised as Jewish. This is brought to its 'logical' extreme primarily in the German and parts of the wider European neo-Nazi scene, where nationalists have readopted socialist rhetoric, albeit coupled with beliefs in the 'people', 'nation' or 'German values'.

So the remark about usury shows that anti-Semitism in Nick Griffin's politics has not suddenly vanished. Anti-Semitism is still an element of BNP ideology, although now it manifests itself in the populist scapegoating of bankers and finance workers for the economic crisis.

True enough, in its populist form the BNP's emphasis is mostly on anti-immigration and Islamophobic rhetoric. But its populist ultra-nationalism lets it stay in touch with the neo-Nazi obsession with what they see as an international Jewish conspiracy of bankers and speculators.

This is something that the UAF analysis is unable to grasp: where Griffin presents the BNP as a populist anti-greed, anti-sleaze and anti-war party, this is not to hide its true colours; rather it is entirely compatible with his version of ethno-pluralist nationalism.

Raphael Schlembach is an editor of Shift Magazine.

remember, remember...

ungdomshuset

Mass arrests of anarchist activists, squatters and punks are nothing new to Copenhagen. Compared with the battle to protect an autonomous social centre in 2007, the climate protests last December hardly saw the worst of the Danish police.

An extraordinary wave of state repression against left-wing structures hit Denmark early in 2007. Large numbers of police, helped by anti-terror units, ran operations against Copenhagen's "scene" of punks, anarchists and alternative youths. Hundreds of anti-establishment activists were arrested, some during peaceful anti-police demonstrations, some during violent riots, and some in their own homes. Most were not charged with any crime, but were remanded in custody for periods of up to 27 days, pending further "investigation" into their political conduct. Numerous alternative housing projects, bars and social centres were violently entered by anti-riot police units, using tear gas and breaking doors, windows and bones. Homes and even a high school were searched. Police also entered the offices of the group "ABC", which provided legal aid and psychological support to the hundreds of prisoners, arresting everyone within it. Dozens of protesters were admitted to hospital after the worst days of police violence, some with severe injuries. During the heights of the street fights between the authorities and anti-police protesters, any Danish citizen with an "alternative look" about them could risk arrest, while foreign activists were liable for immediate deportation. Controls at the border with Germany were stepped up, as were police controls on the motorways leading to Copenhagen. On 1 March, citizens were advised by the authorities to stay out of the districts where major police operations were expected. Schools and shops remained closed.

At the centre of attention stood an alternative youth centre – the "Ungdomshuset". The building was "given" to activists by the City Council in 1982, after a decade of campaigning in the 1970s for an autonomously-run social centre. In its 25 years of existence, the Ungdomshuset provided co-operative housing and functioned as a vibrant centre for youth culture. Ownership of the premises, however, had remained with the Council. In 2000, the Council sold the house to a right-wing Christian sect, which designated the building for demolition. Unwilling to give up their project, activists kept the house occupied and the centre running. At 7am on 1 March 2007, police and anti-terror units sealed off the streets surrounding the Ungdomshuset and began a full-scale eviction. A crane lifted a container next to the house from which police could enter the windows. Simultaneously, police used helicopters to reach the roof of the building. The eviction lasted about one hour. What happened inside is unclear. No press or bystanders were permitted near the scene. It is known, however, that two ambulances were called to the premises and that all 35 people in the house were arrested and

were remanded in custody for initially 27 days.

When news about the eviction got around, the Copenhagen "scene" began to assemble in the streets near the Ungdomshuset. The same afternoon, thousands of people were in the area, forming a protest march, with some attempting to get close to the building. With emotions running high and fuelled by aggressive provocations from the side of the anti-riot police, some bottles and cobblestones were soon thrown at the lines of police. They, in turn, responded with tear gas and arrests. Tension on the streets of Copenhagen lasted for the next two days. During daytime, hundreds of protesters would form marches into the town centre, which were occasionally attacked by police forces. During quieter hours, anti-terror units would patrol the streets with armoured vehicles. At night, activists employed guerrilla tactics, building burning barricades and torching cars, just to disappear again when police arrived on the scene. The riots were used by the authorities to justify an unprecedented scale of repression. During the first 24 hours after the eviction of the Ungdomshuset alone, nearly 300 alternative youths were arrested by "snatch squads". Many were severely injured during the protests, frequently being hit or run over by police vehicles. Some 270 people had already been arrested in the previous December, when police attacked a 1,000 strong anti-eviction demonstration and a riot ensued.

It was not long until the eviction made international news too. Following the eviction activists from other European countries responded widely with dozens of solidarity demonstrations. Support came largely from other Scandinavian countries and Germany with hundreds reported on the streets of Berlin, Köln, Hamburg, München, Göttingen, Frankfurt, Hannover, Vienna, Heidelberg, Gothenburg, Oslo, Helsinki, Stockholm, and Leipzig to name but a few. Protesters in these countries also faced police oppression and brutality. The Danish consulate in France was occupied as well as a number of houses in Germany in solidarity with the Ungdomshuset.

The police reaction to the largely peaceful demonstrations in Copenhagen during the UN conference this winter were certainly outrageous, but have to be seen in a context of Danish policing over the past 25 years or so. COP15's mass arrests have taken their place in a history of conflict between left-wing protestors and the Danish police which also includes the massive housing battles in 1986, the 1993 anti-EU membership riots, the 2000 anti-EU summit protests (where police fired live rounds into a demonstration) and the Ungdomshuset demonstrations of 2007.

what next?

We welcome two new editors to Shift Magazine! As of the next issue, Ben Lear and Josie Hooker will join the team.

Do you want to write for Shift? If you have ideas for an article, or want to reply to one, get in touch.

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Thank you,

Shift Editors.

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